Challenges Await San Francisco Schools Chief

By VAUHINI VARA

Richard Carranza will become superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District in July at an especially challenging time.

The 45-year-old faces the specter of midyear budget cuts if a state tax-increase measure fails. That's on top of budget reductions over recent years.

What's more, San Francisco's school-aged population is expected to fall further, which could eat even more into state funding since that is based on the district's student attendance. San Francisco Unified encompasses 161 schools with 56,518 students, compared with 62,621 students in 1991.

Mr. Carranza, a Tucson, Ariz., native, studied education and worked as a teacher and principal before becoming a superintendent in Las Vegas. He arrived in San Francisco in 2009 as the deputy superintendent for instruction, innovation and social justice. His daughters—ages 10 and 15—attend public schools in the city.

Mr. Carranza recently discussed the district's challenges. Excerpts follow:

**WSJ**: What has been cut from San Francisco schools over the past five years during the state's fiscal crisis, and what do you expect to trim in the future if more cuts are required?

**Mr. Carranza**: I think probably the biggest thing is that professional development for all employees in the district—administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals—has to a large extent been eliminated. We've also lost direct support services to schools—including nurses, librarians. And then the resources—schools are having to deal with older instructional materials.

We've also lost the ability to expand things that we know make a difference in kids' lives. So, for example, we haven't been able to expand as much as we'd like things like music and [physical education] programs. If [the state requires future cuts], it will be doomsday—there's no other way to describe it. We [would] see an additional five days cut from the school year [which is currently 180 days].

**WSJ**: What is your position on evaluating teachers' performance based partly on student test scores, which the Los Angeles school district is expected to do after a state superior court judge...
Mr. Carranza: I don't know enough about what they've developed to really even have an opinion yet. What I do appreciate, though, is that L.A. has really been at the forefront of really driving the conversation around finding some solutions, and I do think we can learn a lot.

We're in the process of figuring out how to come up with a [performance-tracking] system that's transparent, that teachers buy into, and that the public understands and buys into as well. If the intent is to use student-performance data to improve instructional practice, we're all for it. If the intent is to use student-performance data to target teachers or blame teachers or fire teachers, then I'm not for it.

WSJ: Can you describe the logic of the lottery system for assigning students to schools? It incorporates factors like where a student's siblings attend school and whether the student lives in a neighborhood with low test scores, but some parents say it doesn't put enough emphasis on keeping students in their neighborhood schools.

Mr. Carranza: I guess the one thing that I've learned even before becoming the superintendent is that not everyone's going to be happy. But with that said, the fact of the matter is that not every student wants to go to their neighborhood school. So what kids want, what families want, is they want good schools—and if a good school happens to be in their neighborhood, they want to go to that school; if they perceive the school in their neighborhood not to be a good school, they want to go somewhere else.

WSJ: Are community schools, where students and their families can obtain services such as health care, something you plan to expand?

Mr. Carranza: We're interviewing to hire a director of community schools in San Francisco. That position is being fully funded through external funders. That person's role will be to coordinate the community-school initiative that we have in a number of our schools already and bring a coherent approach [to the district as a whole]. Our current superintendent has been very supportive of this, but this is absolutely part of my philosophical approach around what we need to do more.

WSJ: What have you learned from your daughters about what's working and not working in San Francisco schools?

Mr. Carranza: They absolutely love their schools. They give me feedback all the time. One of the pieces of feedback is, "Dad, you have to work on the school lunches." I've heard that loud and clear.

Write to Vauhini Vara at vauhini.vara@wsj.com